

# The Man in the Ready-Made Suit

By Gouverneur Morris

**THIS Story, by One of the Famous Short Story Writers of the Day, is the First of His Work to Appear in a Newspaper. The Magazine of The Sunday Star Holds First Publication Rights of His Newspaper Fiction.**

CHARNOCK was impressed to the point of discomfort by the grandeur that surrounded him. For twenty years the ups in his life had not been very high, while some of the downs had touched the lowest situations in which man's predisposition to exist combats—without ever winning definite victories or suffering definite defeats—misfortune, poverty and disease. For a few weeks he had been pretty well "up," for him. His ready-made clothes were new, his hair was newly cut, he had passed the night in a Turkish bath, and there was money in one of his pockets, and an old watch, newly redeemed, in another. To remember that he had once been the model of fashion, at home in great houses, welcome at stage doors, famous for the daring and imagination and good nature, if not the high moral tone, of his exploits, was very difficult. More used now to a younger and a tasteless civilization, the great spaces and the somber tapestries of Gower House depressed him. The servants in livery had a "we-are-better-than-you" look. The mirrors, reflecting—with reluctance, perhaps—his new blue serge suit, an outfit at once above criticism and beneath, seemed to say: "Ready-made."

For once the Gowers had no guests, and were gathered in a family circle—Nora and Evelyn, Bob and Clarence, and, of course, Gower himself. Dinner had come on soft feet, and so gone. It had been a short meal of exquisite cooking and much champagne. Charnock was sorry that he had not drunk more; for wine is a great leveler, and he intended shortly not only to rise level with his surroundings, level with Gower and the young cousins, but above them.

They talked of his life, his adventures, not theirs. Only Gower, a bull-heavy, red-faced man, referred occasionally, with harsh bursts of laughter that ended as suddenly as they began, to old times in New York. At such moments a certain glitter appeared in Charnock's wide-set, light-gray eyes. It was as if the harshness, the loud-mouthed vigor of his cousin offended him, even angered him.

Gower's position in society he had assured himself by careful inquiry. It was as secure as that of the sun in the heavens. His insolence was bounded only by space. He could be as insolent as he pleased. He could be as passionate as he pleased, as cordoning. He could be drunk and outrageous, and look to all eyes for forgiveness, and to some for admiration. Even his liver and his kidneys seemed to have nothing but forgiveness for him. He had a good and sonorous health that defied disease and decay. Charnock could not say "Gower has grown older," but only "He has grown coarser," or "He has grown more brutal."

It incensed the man in the ready-made suit, whose gay and debonaire proclivities life had so humbled, whose kind and generous impulses poverty and hard luck had so thwarted, to observe into what overhearing, because so much money had fallen. Because his inherited millions were as stones in a Connecticut field, the world did not require of Gower even the good qualities that it required of a dog. A nation that consents itself intelligent enough to vote even after a but to him a certain mental ability and grasp of affairs. And he, like all men who have inherited vast fortunes, attributed these qualities to himself. And he believed, in that callous organ that pumped his hot and thirsty blood, that if he was stripped of all his properties he would still be a great man, a great power, a leader among men, a delicious terror to women.

"Like to see my guns?" he said abruptly. They had been talking grouse and Scotland, where Gower rented from year to year a show forest. "Very much," Charnock rose, and followed his great cousin out of the room. The Gower children smiled at each other. Evelyn yawned. He's the first man father was ever polite to. Why?

"Oh, he's father's cousin," said Bob. "They were friends in the old days." "Father told me something special about him," said Clarence. "It seems that grandpa was down on father at one time and threatened to leave all his money to his nephew—Bill Charnock, that is. He even told Charnock so. And of course when it came out the other way, Charnock was awfully disappointed and I guess father feels sorry for him. They say, you know, that he was quite a card—very popular and talented."

"They always say that," said Nora, "about people who passed out a long time ago. When the people come back you find that they are always dull and ordinary and humble." "I don't think Cousin Bill is really humble," said Bob. "Just shy. Once in a while there's a glint in his eye, and then he looks as if he might be quite a cuss when he's roused." "A regular lion," said Nora. "A lion in sheep's clothing," said Evelyn.

"In a ready-made, hand-me-down, without the vest, eighteen dollars!" said Clarence. "Wasn't he even mentioned in the old man's will?" Bob asked. "It never so much as breathed his name. In fact, grandpa died intestate."

"He did not," said Evelyn. "He had a stroke." "He didn't make a will—a testament, silly!" "If he had, and had left everything to Cousin Will," said Evelyn, "where'd we have been? Ouch!"

CHARNOCK drew a deep breath as he followed Gower into the gun room. If he was to rise superior to his surroundings, to the thousands of dollars' worth of dark tape behind sliding glass doors, the time had come. A hint—a ferret worrying a rabbit—caught his eye, and

"There was no harm in the letter. Only in the way it was worded. Your wife was good as an angel. And you know it. But she wrote like a fool. Sit down. We are not going to talk about her."

"Well, what are we going to talk about?" said Gower, with a certain insolence.

"ABOUT the draft—in the chimney," said Charnock. "Sit down—don't be a fool. Mine is the only loaded gun in the gunroom—the only one, perhaps, that has a notch in the stock. Sit down, you overbearing, insolent, pot-bellied swine, and listen."

Charnock, it seemed, was rising superior to his surroundings with a vengeance. His cold, unblinking

found and that you would once more be driven forth. But winter came and went, and it seemed to you that the document must surely have perished. Your conscience never troubled you. Only the fear of being ousted—pried like some stinking grub from the rich fruit on which you were fattening."

"Always admitted your imagination," said Gower.

HE had been thinking as rapidly as he could, and had come to the conclusion that since nothing could be proved against him, nothing could be known.

"Why not take this tale of woe to some one who'd enjoy listening to it?" he said. "I don't. But I'll have some disconcerted person and do the ancient mariner. You expected a

want to bring harm, and scandal on your own blood."

"Yours and mine?" Charnock laughed melodiously. "I am thinking of the children not because they are cousins—but in spite of the fact. I will not hurt them simply because her blood is in them. Understand that. Our noble blue strain does not count with me. No. My property shall go intact to her children."

"After your death," sneered Gower. "No," said Charnock, "after yours." "If that's all that's troubling you, be assured that according to my will the property goes to them in equal shares. So all this hullabaloo is rather fool work. Who'd I leave the stuff to if not to them?"

"Your wit works slowly," said Charnock. "Your death, in the course of

been leaning and sinking into its leather depths.

"Once," he said, "I was a man of war; but there weren't enough men of war on our side. Atvado, the capital of the little republic, was so hemmed in by the rebels that it became necessary to transfer the seat of government and the state archives to the summer capital—a town of infinitesimal size, but formidable strength—in the mountains. As aide-camp, I accompanied the president in his—we call it change of base—the enemy called it retreat."

"After three days in which we had very little to eat and nothing to keep us going but the president's gifts as a joker and a story-teller, we were captured while trying to cross a swollen river. Our captors didn't know who we were, for we were not in uniform, and if we could get rid of certain incriminating papers which had been divided among us, there was a chance of prolonging our lives until our party should be in the ascendant."

"We were not searched immediately. The president rode off between two men—talking gayly and making them laugh. The rest of us followed, each between two of our captors with drawn swords. In crossing a stream, the president's sword and scabbard, of which he had not been deprived, came loose and fell into the water. Some attempt was made to recover them, but the mud was deep. The little man—he made you think of a quadrumanus—made a great fuss over his loss. I could hardly keep from laughing aloud, for I knew that the blade of his sword was but six inches long, and that the space thus left empty in the scabbard was stuffed with incriminating papers."

"But presently, though he had other papers scattered about his person, he was laughing again and joking and telling stories."

"That night about the camp fire, captor and captive, we listened for hours to stories that the little president told. Oh, the true romance sat on that man's shoulders! Stories tragic and gay, dramatic, wholesome, indecent, pathetic and comic, fell from his lips in a steady stream of bright coloring and miraculously chosen words. He held us fascinated, spellbound, in the ring of light."

"Cigars and cigarettes kept going out, which, perhaps, among Spaniards, is greater tribute to an artist than hand-clapping and bravos. In particular, the president's cigar kept going out. I can see him now—talking all the while—looking here and there for something with which to light it. Finally he begins to feel at random in his pockets, comes out presently with a piece of paper, lights it at the fire, lights his cigar—and sees the remainder of the piece of paper burn to ashes."

"One by one, piece by piece, talking all the time, he destroyed all the tangible evidence against him that was in his pockets. And under cover of his talk, the rest of us followed suit. If our lives hadn't seemed to hang upon the destruction, it would have been comic. Our captors were farm boys—yokels—not stupid, but easily taken in. I remember I had one paper—"

Here Charnock reached into his pocket and pulled out his uncle's will. "As big as this. I had rid myself of everything else."

HE sat well forward on the edge of his deep chair, and his hands close to the first, began nonchalantly to roll the document between his thumb and forefinger, beginning at one corner, into a sort of long lighter. "I don't know why, but my nerves began to go to pieces. I couldn't stick the thing into the flames. It seemed to me as if I had to wait until something happened that would draw all eyes in another direction."

"What was that?"

Of the five, Charnock alone did not show any concern. He leaned still farther forward, and thrust the will into the flames, where it was almost instantly consumed.

Bob had risen to his feet.

"It sounded like a pistol shot," he said. "What the deuce—"

"Hope," drawled Evelyn, "father knew it was loaded. Better go see if it's anything—somebody."

But there was no need. Gower, his face at once evil and sheepish, thrust open a door and came in. He carried Charnock's pistol in one hand.

"Did you hear a shot?" he said. "Damned twangled weapons! I might have hurt myself."

"What happened, father?"

"Oh, I almost had an accident."

His eyes, very watchful for him, were on Charnock. This one rose lazily, his back to the fire, his hands thrust into the pockets of his ready-made coat.

"I almost had an accident, too," he said, smiling. "I was telling these young people a story. And in my excitement I almost burned a valuable paper."

"Almost?" Gower's voice trembled a little.

"Yes," said Charnock slowly. "The paper I actually burned was a facsimile."

A kind of black rage rose in Gower's face. He had put his cousin down for a simper; he had thought, by firing a shot, to accomplish the destruction of the will. He lurched forward, making with his pistol hand a gesture that may or may not have been threatening.

"You—" he began.

But the cold glint in Charnock's eyes cut him short.

"I had forgotten to tell you young people," said Charnock "that when I was captured, they took the revolvers from my holsters. But I was never a man to depend upon the obvious. And I had in reserve, in my jacket pocket, a pair of forty-one caliber derringers, old style. I was expecting with these that I could have shot through the cloth of the pockets and killed my man at—oh, the distance from me to your father. Better carry that automatic back to the gunroom, hadn't you, before you have a real accident?"

He laughed cheerfully, while Gower, without a word, turned and went back to the gunroom.

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## A Double Offense.

"We have kidnapped your son-in-law and are going to hold him until you pay us \$10,000 ransom."

"You flatter him and insult me!" interrupted the iron-jawed old gent. "Keep him!"

## Ring Lardner Writes of Capital's Traffic Laws

**His Idea of Making the Punishment Fit the Crime—Suggestions for Washington's Police and for Drivers of Automobiles.**

TO the Editor: During my visit to Washington a while ago the people that has charge of the automobile traffic in the dist. of Columbia was all steamed up over the way motorists was disobeying the laws and what was to be done to learn drivers a lesson and etc. and finally one of the commissioners or something give it as his opinion that the trouble was on acct. of the penalties not being severe enough, like for inst. most drivers would rather shoot along about 25 to 30 miles per hr. and run the slight risk of getting arrested once in a while rather than always crawl along like a snail's pace and never get nowhere in time for the cocktails. Make the punishment fit the crime was this guy's slogan and 2 of his suggestions was as follows:

A motorist caught speeding in the dist. should be made to draw up to the curb and stay there 15 minutes, the cop to act as time keeper.

When a motorist parked his car in a place where parking was not al-

lowed, they done to him, but I suppose he got fined \$50.00 or a \$100.00 which was just chicken food to him you might say. What they ought to done would be to first make him sober up and then lock him in a room for a wk. with nobody to talk to but a traffic policeman.

PENALTIES like the above would soon put a end to violations of the motor laws and in the same way crimes of all kinds could be did away with if the punishments fitted them like for inst. the way it is now days a man is arrested for boot legging and they send him to jail for 6 mos. or a yr. and when he comes out he can live in the lap of luxury on what he saved up before they got him. The right way to deal with this bird would be to lock him up with a bul. of his own hootch and not leave him out till he drunk it.

Or suppose they's a gal murders her husband or some other lady's husband. Under the present system they print her picture 5 and 6 times a day for a couple of months and give her 9 columns every edition to talk about herself and the only real draw back is when the jury lets her go and she has to kiss 12 good men and true that ain't washed their face for a wk. and chews tobacco.

Well, friends, you won't never stop the wholesale murder of cents by the opp. sex with no such methods as that.



"LOCK HIM IN A ROOM FOR A WEEK WITH NOBODY TO TALK TO BUT A TRAFFIC POLICEMAN."

lowed, or parked too long in a place where they was a time limit on parking, a special patent locking device would be put on the car by the cop, and the only keys to the lock would be kept in the various police stations and when the motorist come for his car and found it locked, he would half to go to the nearest police station and give proof that he was the owner of the car and also put up as much money as the police thought the car was worth so in case it turned out that he wasn't the owner, why when the real owner showed up and complained that his car had been stole, they could give him the money instead of bothering to look for his car. This cash bond would be left in the station a wk. and if nobody showed up in that time to say the car was his, the dough would be returned to the guy that put it up.

THE way to stop it is for the newspapers and police to work together. Let the last named arrest the murderers as they wish, but whether they arrest her or don't arrest her, let the papers treat her the same as if she was a good woman and had did nothing all her life but good deeds; i.e., don't mention her name.

RING W. LARDNER.  
Great Neck, Dec. 9.

## Curious Foods.

GRASSHOPPERS have been eaten from the earliest times. The Scriptures offer abundant evidence of this, and the law of Moses is very plain indeed in its permission to the people of Israel to eat "the locust after his kind, the bald locust after his kind and the grasshopper after his kind."

There were two ways of preparing grasshoppers to be eaten. They were either crushed in wine and eaten without cooking or their wings were plucked off and they were boiled in salt water and then dried in the sun, when they were ready to be eaten.

Ants are eaten in Africa. Junker relates that the chief of a tribe on the Masharrah river, in the Sudan, sent him twenty baskets of ants for provisions on his journey. They are pounded into a sort of paste and are said to taste like liver.

Moths and butterflies have often been eaten, and the Romans used beetles as food. Some Brazilians are said to esteem a bug that feeds on the palm leaf. In Chile and Peru one of the national dishes, the chupido chiche, is a sort of stew made of potatoes and the chiche, a beetle-like insect that is found in quantities under stones along the water courses.

Nearly every specimen of animal that has a backbone is somewhere or other eaten by human beings. In the Andaman Islands the eating of a live rodent is deemed a test of manhood, and no man, it is said, is permitted to marry until he has accomplished this feat. The Chinese are not alone in eating roast dogs, for our own Sioux Indians have from time immemorial been very fond of this food, and a century ago dogs were a favorite meat with the negroes of Louisiana. African negroes eat the lion, the jackal, the hyena and the crocodile.

Few Blind Men Smoke.

"The sense of sight is responsible to a great extent for the fascination in smoking," said the psychologist as he puffed on his cigar. "In fact, the senses of taste and smell come second to sight in deriving enjoyment from a good smoke. The greatest part of the pleasure a man has in smoking is seeing the smoke blow from his mouth and float in the air."

"I have noted that sightless men seldom smoke. I have asked many sightless men why they did not smoke, and they replied they could not derive much pleasure from it as they could not see the smoke."

If a man come along at night without a tail light I would make him back up 5 miles on the right side of the road or if his head lights was too bright I would wait till it was time for the theaters to let out and then make him drive up and down Broadway between 40th and 50th st. blind folded.

Once in a while you read about a motorist disobeying 2 or 3 laws at once like for inst. they was a prominent New Yorker got his name in the papers a while ago for speeding, driving on the left side of the street and driving while intoxicated all at the same time. I never seen it printed



GOWER SNATCHED AT THE WILL, AND GAVE A SHARP CRY AS IF HE HAD BEEN STUNG BY A WASP. HIS HAND HAD CLOSED—NOT ON THE DESTRUCTIBLE PAPER—BUT ON A TUBE OF COLD STEEL.

gize and to say: "I'm sorry, but I don't own any evening clothes. In my world they aren't worn. He had not added, "in my world the clothes a man dines in are often the clothes he sleeps in."

"I don't want to look at your guns, if you don't mind. I want to talk to you. If you don't mind, I'll ring for whisky."

Gower burst into his short, harsh laugh. "Then push three times," he said. "Any bell in this house, pushed three times, brings whisky. I tried the front doorbell on a bet once, and sure enough, a man came with a tray."

"I've seen times," said Charnock, "when three hundred cries to heaven wouldn't produce a thimbleful of water."

A man came with whisky and its perquisites, put them upon a low table, and went.

"Say when. The way to enjoy liquor is to pretend that each drink is to be your last—forever."

"When," said Charnock. He filled the remainder of his glass with soda and drank feverishly. Then he went and stood looking into the empty fireplace. Presently he leaned forward and held his hand near the opening of the fire. He withdrew it, straightened his back, and turned to Gower.

"That chimney always had a strong draft," he said.

"What's that?" Gower snapped, and an impatient, or startled, motion of his hand overturned an empty soda bottle.

"I said that chimney always had a strong draft."

"All the chimneys in this house are scientifically constructed."

"I am reminded," said Charnock, "of a letter I once had from—from a girl. It seemed better to destroy it. There was a fire going in here. I chucked the letter into the flames, and saw it sucked up the chimney, not even signed. I hunted the grounds all night with a lantern. I even hunted over the roof."

The reds of Gower's heavy face had a black tinge in the shadows. He looked at the toes of his outstretched feet, and shielded his eyes with one hand as if he found the lights of the gunroom too many and too bright.

"I got the letter back," said Charnock, "but it cost me a thousand dollars. Or rather it cost my uncle—your father—that I had to go to him with the whole story. He was white about it—white."

"Who blackmailed you?"

Gower's sudden harsh, mirthless, overbearing laugh was again in evidence.

"Her brother," said Charnock simply. "He afterward, thanks to very strong backing, became a member of the United States Senate, proved a bulwark to certain special interests, and died in an odor of great sanctity. Fell, in short, or was pushed from an upper window in a house of ill fame."

Gower's face had grown darker and darker.

"The letter," he said, "was from the woman I married."

"It was?"

"By Gower!"

He started to his feet, but was met and quelled by a pair of eyes suddenly grown hard as steel.

eyes, his blue, shining automatic dominated the scene.

"You are drunk," said Gower. "Crazy."

"If I am drunk," said Charnock, "it is with righteousness. If I am crazy it is you who have made me so—you who have so battered and fattened upon the felony that has made the waste places of the earth my home, its outcasts and unfortunate companions. I am drunk with knowledge, the knowledge that with all your millions you have done no good in the world, and that I, for all the soundings of poverty and unsuccess, have done a little, and shall not be turned back now from doing more."

"You cannot take your eyes off my little pistol. I return it to its pocket in my ready-made suit of clothes. Do not forget that it is there. Put out a drink if you like—it's on the house—the ferret's house—See the ferret—there, over the mantel. He is worrying the life out of the fat rabbit, just as I am going to worry the life out of you."

"This room," he continued, in a milder tone—you might have called it a reminiscent tone—"was uncle's office in the old days. Here he had his papers all in order in the old days, all docketed, all neatly tied with tape. The night he lay dying, the doctors about him, his favorite nephew—though I say it that shouldn't—the servants gathered in the hall, weeping—the night the good old man, the good friend, the more than father, lay dying, this room was broken into by thieves."

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"You," said Charnock, "the worthless, lying, check-forging son, who had been forbidden the house and the countenance of the father, aided by a thug, a common thief, a second-story man, broke into this room—"

"Prove it!" cried Gower suddenly. "Prove it—damn you—prove it!"

Your friend, the second-story man, is dead," said Charnock; "but it was not for nothing that God brought us two together in the Painted Desert."

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legacy. You were disappointed. Jealousy inspires your tale. Who would take your word—against mine?"

"Ah," said Charnock, "you haven't been rich for nothing! Wealth has taught you something. If I am not, however, your words that would be believed over mine—but your money. But you—you yourself—believe my jealous imaginings—don't you?"

He had for answer only the rich man's short, ugly laugh.

"You married," Charnock went on. "The girl, goaded by those who should have protected her, went pale to the altar. Her heart was never yours. One day the old gardener, to whom she had been kind, sent for her. He was dying. He had a paper that he thought she ought to see. He had found it in the garden. He had had it for a long time. He ought, he knew, to have done something about it. But he had been afraid."

"When she had read the paper, your wife hid it. Why? Because she, too, was without honor? No; but because she was going to have a child. For the sake of her child, she hid the paper—and she kept it hidden for the sake of that child and for the sake of others that followed. But last year, when she knew that she was going to die, it seemed to her better that her children should starve than that she should go to her Maker with so low a crime upon her soul. So she wrote to me, explaining what she had done, and inclosing the will that you had thrown into the flames. But that she never knew—or she couldn't have kept silent all these years."

"Of course," she said in her letter, "if my husband had ever known of this, you would have had your rights. It is all my crime—all my selfishness."

"Come to the point," said Gower. "What are you driving at?"

"Why," said Charnock, "I have the will."

"You will have to prove that it is not a forgery. It will cost you money to prove that—much money."

He laughed his laugh.

"It will cost nothing. We shall not appear against each other in a court of law. Our court is here. Face to face in this room, we shall settle our differences."

"Your idea is to despoil me of everything?"

"Despoil? That is a hard word to swallow. I shall take nothing from you that is yours—not even your life. In self-defense, I might kill you. Attack me if you like, and see."

Gower's heavy face worked hard, as if he were chewing some tough substance. That his cousin really had the will, he had no real doubt. That his cousin could really despoil him, he had some doubts; but they were not altogether satisfactory. A compromise of some sort suggested itself as the best way out of the difficulty and when he spoke to that end it was in a milder and more agreeable voice.

"Come, old man," he said, "you've had a rough deal. What'll you take for the will?"

"You mean how much money?" Charnock smiled sweetly. "My conscience," he said, "is worth far more to me than any amount of money. Your children have not injured me knowingly—blood—"

"Yes, that's it. After all, you don't

nature is too uncertain—too far off, perhaps—to fill my purposes. Do you believe in hell?"

"Do you?"

"I should like to see the question tested—tonight—in your person."

"I suppose you think I'd come flying back to tell you."

"It would be sufficient," said Charnock, "if you found out for yourself that there was such a place. And by my soul, I think you will."

Gower's face was rising; for Charnock did not seem to him altogether sane.

"But you're not going to kill me?"

"How do you will save me the trouble. It is fitting that you should kill yourself. First, you are not fit to live; and second, you know it. I shall leave my little automatic with you. I shall join the young people and when I hear a shot, I shall burn the will."

"How do I know you will?"

"Because you know that I will."

The stately eyes glinted with the firm light of unassailable honor.

"Show it to me."

"There, then: Is that it—or isn't it?"

As if finally acknowledging defeat, Gower gave one troubled look at the document, and allowed his head to fall forward on his breast. Then, treacherous, quick as lightning, he snatched at the will, and